NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FN
BACKGROUNDER 1-0496 APRIL 2, 1976
WAYNE COREY/BANGKOK

THAI ELECTION PREVIEW

ANNCR:

ON SUNDAY, THAILAND WILL HOLD A GENERAL ELECTION WHICH IS CONSIDERED AN IMPORTANT TEST OF THAT COUNTRY'S DEMOCRACY. WITH A BACKGROUND REPORT, HERE IS WAYNE COREY IN BANGKOK:

VOICE:

THIS WILL BE THAILAND'S SECOND GENERAL ELECTION SINCE THE OVERTHROW OF THE LAST MILITARY GOVERNMENT IN OCTOBER, NINETEEN SEVENTY-THREE. IN JANUARY, NINETEEN SEVENTY-FIVE, THAILAND'S VOTERS ELECTED A MULTI-PARTY NATIONAL ASSEMBLY WHICH FORMED A FRAGILE COALITION GOVERNMENT HEADED BY SENI PRAMOJ, BROTHER OF THE PRESENT PRIME MINISTER KUKRIT PRAMOJ. THE SENI GOVERNMENT FELL BEFORE A NO-CONFIDENCE VOTE ALMOST BEFORE IT HAD BEEN SEATED, AND WAS REPLACED BY ANOTHER LOOSE COALITION HEADED BY MISTER KUKRIT.

AFTER LESS THAN A YEAR IN OFFICE, PRIME MINISTER KUKRIT FOUND HIMSELF UNDER THE PRESSURE OF AN IMPENDING NO-CONFIDENCE VOTE. HE ANNOUNCED THAT HIS COALITION HAD BECOME UNMANAGEABLE AND HE HAD DECIDED TO DISSOLVE PARLIAMENT. NEW ELECTIONS WERE SCHEDULED FOR APRIL FOURTH.

MISTER KUKRIT HOPES TO LEAD A STRONGER COALITION AFTER SUNDAY'S ELECTION. HE BELIEVES HIS SOCIAL ACTION PARTY, IF AGAIN COMBINED WITH DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER PRAMARN ADIREKSAN'S THAI NATIONAL PARTY, WHICH HAS MILITARY SUPPORT, COULD PROVIDE THE BASIS FOR A COALITION THAT WOULD CONTAIN FEWER PARTIES, BUT MORE SEATS IN THE EXPANDED TWO HUNDRED SEVENTY-NINE MEMBER LOWER HOUSE. AT FIRST, IT WAS FEARED THAT THE

EXISTENCE OF MORE THAN FIFTY PARTIES WOULD MAKE A WORKABLE COALITION IMPOSSIBLE. BUT ONLY THIRTY-NINE PARTIES ARE FIELDING CANDIDATES IN SUNDAY'S ELECTION, AND INTENSE EFFORTS HAVE BEEN UNDERWAY TO MERGE THE SMALLEST PARTIES WITH THE LARGEST.

PRIME MINISTER KUKRIT HAS PUSHED HARD FOR GREATER ECONOMIC BENEFITS FOR THAI FARMERS -- A MOVE WHICH POLITICAL ANALYSTS SAY APPEALS TO PEOPLE WHO ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THE HIGH DEGREE OF ATTENTION URBAN BANGKOK ITSELF USUALLY HAS RECEIVED FROM POLITICANS. BUT THE ISSUES HAVE TENDED TO BE OBSCURED BY CAMPAIGN VIOLENCE, WHICH HAS CLAIMED THE LIFE OF A SOCIALIST PARTY LEADER AND A NUMBER OF WORKERS FOR OTHER PARTIES.

ABOUT TWENTY-ONE MILLION THAIS ARE ELIGIBLE TO VOTE IN SUNDAY'S ELECTION. THEY WILL BE CHOOSING FROM AMONG TWO AND A HALF THOUSAND CANDIDATES. THAI NEWSPAPERS HAVE BEEN STRESSING THAT THE REAL ISSUE AT STAKE IS THE FUTURE OF THE COUNTRY'S DEMOCRACY. AS THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE "BANGKOK WORLD" PUT IT: "A VOTE ON SUNDAY FOR WHATEVER PARTY WILL SHOW A BELIEF IN THE DEMOCRACY THAT WAS SO HARD FOUGHT FOR." IT ADDED: "WE DONT' WANT A DICTATORSHIP AGAIN."

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